Excerpt from a radio talk by
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HOW TO READ THE LABEL

The Family Medicine Cabinet

My "Read-the-Label" subject today is your family medicine cabinet; but first let me say, if your medicine cabinet is full of drugs which are left-over prescriptions from previous illnesses, and medicines the properties or effects of which you do not know, my advice is to clean it out. Such products may be deteriorated, ineffective, or even dangerous.

Your medicine cabinet will contain a package of absorbent cotton U.S.P. The term "U.S.P." on the label means that the product is a fine quality of cotton, from which all oil or fat has been extracted so as to increase its absorbent qualities. Keep this well wrapped to keep it free from dust and dirt. You want clean cotton for medical uses. You will have a package of gauze material and a roll of cotton bandage. Both of these will be labeled "sterilized," which means that they have been treated in a manner to free them completely of all bacteria, their spores, and living organisms--- so that when used they will not cause infection. A small roll of adhesive tape completes your materials for dressings, but you may also have a small container of styptic cotton N.F. This is prepared according to the description in the National Formulary. It is cotton impregnated with iron chloride solution and is used as a first aid for styptic purposes, that is, to help stop bleeding.

The next class of medicine-cabinet home-treatment accessories includes those used for antiseptic, sterilizing, and disinfecting purposes.

Tincture of Iodine U.S.P. is a powerful germicide and antiseptic for wounds. It is also used as a counterirritant for sprains and bruises. If your tincture of iodine is labeled "Tincture of Iodine, U.S.P." or "Tincture of Iodine," it will be an alcoholic solution containing between 6½ and 7½ per cent of iodine, and between 4½ and 5½ per cent of Potassium Iodide. Keep the bottle tightly stopped, otherwise the alcohol will gradually evaporate, leaving the solution too concentrated. Half strength Tincture of Iodine is sometimes sold. Therefore, read the label. If the bottle you buy is the dilute tincture, the label will tell you so.

Your medicine cabinet will probably contain a small bottle of boric acid U.S.P. which, in saturated water solution, is used as an eyewash and for bathing infants. Next, you will have a bottle of hydrogen peroxide solution U.S.P. The official U.S.P. preparation contains 3% or more of hydrogen peroxide and generally this product is prevented from undergoing

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rapid deterioration by the addition of acetanilid as a preservative. Read the label and you will find a statement of the fact if the product contains acetanilid. This product is useful as a local germicide, if used full strength; and, diluted, as a mouth wash.

Your cabinet will also contain a bottle of compound solution of cresol U.S.P. This is a powerful germicide used for disinfecting toilet bowls and sickroom pans; also for disinfecting instruments. This product not only must comply with the standards laid down in the U. S. Pharmacopoeia, but also, if shipped in interstate commerce, the label must comply with the Federal insecticide act by declaring the name and percentage of active germicidal ingredients and the total amount of inert ingredients, or the percentage and names of the inert ingredients.

Your medicine cabinet will probably also contain preparations to be used as first aids for burns. Lime liniment U.S.P., also known as Carron Oil, which is a product made from equal parts of lime water and linseed oil, is an excellent first aid for burns, and if it is labeled "lime liniment U.S.P." or "lime liniment," or "Carron oil," it will be the standard official preparation. Next, comes sodium bicarbonate U.S.P. This product is used for burns by making a paste with water. It is also used as an antacid to relieve heartburn. The ordinary baking soda of the kitchen is generally similar in all respects to the official U.S.P. article, and therefore such a product may be substituted for U.S.P. bicarbonate of soda. Do not confuse this with washing soda, which is a different article.

Milk of magnesia U.S.P. is another official preparation used as an antacid. It is mildly laxative.

On the next shelf, you will have a bottle of syrup of Ipecac U.S.P., which is an official preparation and used as an emetic and as a nauseating expectorant. Another emetic is brown mustard U.S.P. and this may also be used for making mustard plasters. U.S.P. brown mustard is slightly stronger than the ordinary ground mustard of the kitchen, but for many first aid purposes the kitchen product will serve just as well. Then comes a bottle of spirits of camphor U.S.P. The official product contains 10% camphor in alcohol.

The bottom shelf of the medicine cabinet will have on it a bottle of ammonia water U.S.P. A cheaper preparation, which is usually satisfactory for external use, is household ammonia. This may be used for insect bites, and, with olive oil, as a stimulating liniment. Ammonia water, U.S.P. contains 10% ammonia and is required under the Federal caustic poison act to be labeled "Poison," because the caustic poison act, which is enforced by the Food and Drug Administration, requires certain corrosive poisons to be labeled as POISONS and preparations containing in excess of 5% of ammonia are considered corrosive poisons. Likewise, the caustic poison act requires the label to bear a statement of the antidote to be used in case of accidental poisoning by the product. This law applies only to products shipped in interstate commerce, therefore locally

bottled products may not be so labeled. Aromatic spirits of ammonia U.S.P., another official preparation, is useful as a first aid where a rapidly acting and efficient stimulant is needed.

Then you will find in the medicine cabinet a small box of sulphur ointment U.S.P., still another official preparation, useful in itch. Next to this will be a can of zinc stearate U.S.P. used for chafing. Then comes a small vial of oil of cloves U.S.P., used as a local application for temporary relief of pain in toothache and in a limited way as a local anaesthetic and antiseptic. And then there may be a jar of petrolatum, or petroleum jelly, useful in the treatment of scalds or burns. Or some ointment of rose water, useful for the same purpose. Rose water ointment is a very old preparation--- it has been used for more than a thousand years. Galen, an ancient Roman, mentioned it way back in the days when we say the world was young. And it is still valuable for certain purposes.

If any of the United States Pharmacopoeia or National Formulary products named actually differ from the quality or strength or composition laid down in these standard books, such products will be labeled "Not U.S.P." or "Not N.F." as the case may be, and the way they differ will be stated on the label. Occasionally some manufacturers will call substandard products by a coined fanciful name, this, in order to avoid saying on the label that they are "Not U.S.P." or "Not N.F."

Your medicine cabinet, too, will contain your favorite tooth powder or paste, but no matter what the labels say, you should remember that tooth powders and pastes serve one function and one only--- and that is as cleansing agents.

Now, we come to another important item in the medicine cabinet, the oral fever thermometer, a delicate, precise, scientifically constructed instrument for determining the body temperature.

You will have a temperature thermometer in your medicine cabinet because, on the development of fever by any member of your family, you will wish to call a physician and the temperature thermometer, if properly used, will tell you accurately whether fever exists or not. The commonly accepted normal temperature of human beings is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, but many persons have normal temperatures slightly under or above this figure.

Thermometers used for determining body temperature are very delicate instruments and are very easy to get out of order. Your fever thermometer should by all means be a high-grade one. It will be correctly constructed of the best materials and workmanship. It will be well marked with permanent graduations. It will be carefully and accurately tested. It will not have a separating or retreating mercury column. The case will be convenient and will furnish full protection to the instrument.

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